

show the world community that the United States stands with its allies.

COLOMBIAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by associating myself with the very eloquent remarks of my colleague from Miami, Mr. DIAZ-BALART.

Mr. Speaker, you never get a second chance to make a first impression, so the old saying goes that we've all heard. Once first impressions are made, it can be difficult to reinvent oneself. Circumstances may change, but assumptions and perceptions are very stubborn things. Just ask any Colombian.

People became familiar with the country of Colombia in the 1980s and the 1990s as the drug wars exploded. We didn't know much about the place, but we were familiar with the highlights: Bloody drug wars fought in jungles and on the streets of cities like Medellin, Bogota and Cali. And although we probably couldn't name many of the elected officials in Colombia, everyone knew the name of Pablo Escobar, the drug lord.

But over the course of this decade, a dramatic transformation has taken place in Colombia. The rule of gang lords has been replaced by the rule of law. The streets have become safe again. Armed terrorist organizations no longer operate in huge swaths of the country with impunity, and paramilitary groups have been dismantled with their leaders having gone to jail.

Funding for the Colombian Justice Department has nearly doubled, to ensure that criminal cases, old and new, are dealt with professionally and expeditiously, sending a clear signal that the days of impunity are long gone. Poverty has been cut dramatically, while social spending has increased. The Colombia of today is unrecognizable to those who knew it just a decade ago.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege of being there on several occasions and have been amazed by what I have seen. Nowhere is the transformation starker than in the city of Medellin. This city was ground zero for the Escobar drug cartel. Its murder rate rivaled the most dangerous places on the face of the Earth. Terror and violence ruled everyday life.

Today, the city tells an utterly different story. Violence has plummeted. New public transportation projects and schools have given hope to previously blighted neighborhoods. New jobs and development, especially in the apparel industry, have provided a path to that first rung of the economic ladder, and greater upward mobility which was totally unheard of just a few years ago.

Mr. Speaker, fair trade and specialty coffee industries have also provided

new opportunities for well-paying jobs in the area. This thriving community is a shining example of the stunning turnaround that it has made since 2002.

And yet much of the world has failed to take notice. While hostages and explosions make for front-page headlines, the slow and steady work of rebuilding a country is far less flashy. But the very difficult and remarkable work that has been done deserves recognizing. Many of us in Congress are working hard to solidify the gains that have been made through the implication of a free trade agreement. This agreement is strongly supported by the private sector unions of Colombia because they welcome the jobs and opportunity that the agreement will bring.

I hope very much that the free trade agreement will be considered soon for a vote. But as this debate does go forward, I believe it must proceed based on facts, not assumptions, inaccurate perceptions, and outdated figures. When we talk about Colombia in the year 2008, we are not talking about the Colombia of Pablo Escobar. We are talking about a country transformed and on the mend. After the long, difficult struggle of the Colombian people, we owe them a little credit and recognition for the remarkable things that they have accomplished.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FRANKS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FRANKS of Arizona addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MORAN of Kansas addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MCCARTHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mrs. MCCARTHY of New York addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WATERS addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. WESTMORELAND) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. WESTMORELAND addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. WEINER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

BUDGET SCHOOL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentlewoman from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the recognition and I appreciate the opportunity to come and talk about a subject that is near and dear to the heart of every single taxpayer in this Nation. That subject is the Federal budget. It is something that as we debate issues here, we say it affects 10 percent or 20 percent or 50 percent of the population. Our Federal budget, it affects everyone, Mr. Speaker, and I think we should start this second session of budget school with a little bit of perspective.

I have got a copy of the Constitution of the United States, and there is also included in this a Declaration of Independence. Now this copy is small enough to fit into my pocket. I could put it in my jacket pocket and carry it with me all day long.

What is a little bit frightening, Mr. Speaker, is here is the phone book for the news media that covers Washington, D.C. We are one of the most covered places on the face of the Earth, and here is the phone book that covers that.

Well, I also have the Federal budget. As you can see, it is an enormous document. It is much larger. By the time you have the tables and the justifications and the analytical information and go through the appendix and find what you need, it is a huge document. It is much larger in size than the simple documents on which this great Nation was founded.

What we are going to do today is talk a little bit about this budget and talk about what our response should be on behalf of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the time. I am coming to the floor as a